

Direct Care Worker Initiatives in Wisconsin 1999-2003

The following is a summary of activities undertaken in Wisconsin to understand or address issues relating to the availability of direct care workers in the field of long-term care, with considerable emphasis on home and community based long-term care.

- **Year of the Long Term Care Worker**

In 1999 George Potaracke, 608-266-8944, george.potaracke@ltc.state.wi.us, Executive Director of the WI Board on Aging and Long Term Care (Ombudsman Program), at the request of his board initiated a process to have the Governor proclaim the “Year of the Long Term Care Worker” (from May 15, 1999 through May 14, 2000). In conjunction with the proclamation, he invited long term care stakeholders to discuss direct care worker issues. The original group of stakeholders met for a year and evolved into the current **Long Term Care Workforce Alliance**. Bob Kellerman, Director of AgeAdvantAge, an Area Agency on Aging, 608-224-6300, Ageadvantage@mailbag.com, is the current Chairperson of the Alliance. Their biggest project for 2003 is to obtain funding to conduct a statewide direct care worker recognition and positive image campaign modeled on the successful project developed by Kenosha County in 1999 and expanded over four years.

- **Workforce Development Workgroup**

In 2000, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services was involved in redesigning the long-term care system into the Family Care Pilots. In conjunction with system redesign, a workgroup was formed to identify strategies to meet the increasing demands for direct care workers. The Workforce Development Workgroup report, available from Alice Mirk in the Center for Delivery Systems Development, 608-261-8878, mirka@dhfs.state.wi.us, describes the workgroup recommendations.

- **Nursing Home Wage Increase**

The Legislature passed a nursing home wage pass-through rate increase that could be used for wages, fringe benefits or to increase staff hours (\$8.3 million in SFY 99-00 and \$11.1 million in SFY 00-01).

- **Medicaid Personal Care Rate**

In SFY 01-02, the Legislature increased the Medicaid Personal Care rate from \$12/hour to \$15/hour. Although there was no direction to make this a wage pass-through, it is expected that the increase has benefited personal care workers.

- **Wisconsin CareGivers Association**

In several areas of the state, county wide caregivers associations formed. In 1999, Carolyn Kennedy, AgeAdvantAge, and Sharon Beall, BALTCR, formed and coordinated a steering committee to develop a statewide caregivers association for Wisconsin based on the Iowa and Ohio models. The Wisconsin CareGivers Association (WCGA) is Wisconsin’s first statewide professional association for all direct care workers. Carolyn is now the WCGA Director, and the organization provides mentoring, opportunities for continuing education, ongoing support, recognition for achievements, and advocacy for the profession and the role of direct care workers. Carolyn: 608-257-2705, wicaregivers@mailbag.com

Healthcare Workforce Collaborative Committee

In 2001 and 2002 a group of stakeholders met quarterly to plan and implement ways to address the critical shortage of professional and paraprofessional health care workers in Wisconsin. Meetings were attended by representatives from major health associations and providers, educational institutions, elected officials, DHFS staff (Divisions of Supportive Living and Public Health), and others. Contact Melanie Foxcroft, BALTCR, 608-267-9098, foxcrma@dhfs.state.wi.us, for information. **Governor McCallum's Health Workforce Shortage Committee** was formed in the fall of 2002 as the result of the report issued by the Health Workforce Collaborative Committee's recommendations. After four months of meetings, the committee issued a report with goals and recommendations in four areas: education, recruitment and retention of workers, redesign of the workplace, and ongoing leadership and structure for health workforce assessment and development. Contact: Anne Dopp, DPH, 608-4882, doppaw@dhfs.state.wi.us.

- **Worker Education Training and Assistance Program**

Another initiative involved the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute's Worker Education Training and Assistance (WETA) initiative. A three-year research project provided education and training to the workers and supervisors in several assisted living facilities and home care agencies. Findings are available from the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute, Ellen Felix, 608-829-3308, esfelix@fastaff.wisc.edu.

- **Workers for Persons with Developmental Disabilities**

Staff in the Department of Health and Family Service's Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Resources (BDDS) and the Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities (WCDD) created a Direct Service Workforce Initiative. They conducted research and produced a report entitled "A Common Understanding of the Direct Service Workforce Crisis" available from the Council. A job survey of a large number of direct support providers for persons with developmental disabilities was conducted, and a conference was held in 2002 to discuss the report and the preliminary findings from the survey and begin to plan the next steps. A project being undertaken by Marinette County and BDDS, described as the third Marinette project earlier in this report, is a retention initiative intended to enhance county-contracted provider agencies' abilities to retain a committed workforce by learning to improve the support and supervision of direct service workers and improve the organizational cultures of their agencies. More information is available from Marcie Brost, BDDS, 608-266-9366, BrostMM@dhfs.state.wi.us, or Howard Mandeville, WCDD, 608-266-9538, MandeHJ@dhfs.state.wi.us.

- **Community Links Workforce Projects**

The Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources (BALTCR), within the WI Department of Health and Family Services, manages the home and community based services programs including the state-funded Community Options Program (COP) for persons with physical disabilities and the elderly. Since 1999, an opportunity has been made available to counties to apply for COP funded Community Links Workforce Project grants, which have ranged from a few thousand to as much as \$50,000. The counties form local coalitions to identify strategies to address worker shortages, determine approaches that will be most successful in their communities to address the issues, and apply for grants to implement their project ideas.

Projects have included innovative ideas for recruiting and retaining workers, expanding the use of technology that enables people to be more independent and reduces the need for workers, and complimenting the work of paid providers with volunteers, informal supports, and regular community resources. Examples that have received national attention include an extensive campaign to improve the image of direct care workers (Kenosha County) and a rural direct care

worker-owned cooperative (Waushara County). For information or a report describing all of the projects in the first four years, contact Judy Zitske, BALTCR, 608-267-9719, zitskjb@dhfs.state.wi.us, or Julie Whitaker, BALTCR, 608-266-8778, whitaja@dhfs.state.wi.us.

Four Year Program Summary, 1999-2002